

**ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP**  
INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL GROWTH  
UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO  
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Hon. Clyde Burmaster & Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD  
Co-Chairs, Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership

Co-Chairs Burmaster and Weinstein,

Attached is the 2004 Year End Report for the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership (ENRP).

As you know, 2004 was a year that saw ENRP focus its efforts on a few key projects, while still maintaining a full slate of advocacy, information sharing, and project work. As a result, we have achieved significant progress on important regional projects, particularly the small business assistance website and the public transportation-job access pilot and policy.

The addition of several new members to ENRP in 2004 resulted in overall attendance at both the subcommittee and general meetings increase, and more significantly resulted in a fresh energy and perspective on our organization and its work.

Several of those new members – including Niagara Falls Mayor Vincent Anello and City of Buffalo Office of Strategic Planning Commissioner Timothy Wanamaker – will be key to an emerging focus for 2005; an urban focus for our Government Affairs Subcommittee.

On a personal note, I'd like to express my appreciation for your continued confidence in me to administrate ENRP, and thank Legislature Chairs George Holt, Jr. and William Ross for their continued commitment to the group. I'm proud of the work we have all done with this group since its inception in 1998. It truly is "regionalism that works."

Sincerely,

Tod A. Kniazuk  
Administrator, Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership

## **Small Business Assistance Website**

ENRP spent the first five months of 2004 researching the number of small business assistance agencies in the two counties, and what programs they provide. The results of our search tallied *275 programs at 60 agencies* in Erie and Niagara Counties. These results were put into a database. We then interviewed several recently opened or expanded small businesses to hear their experience with accessing small business assistance.

The results of our research showed that there are ample programs and agencies out there, but that they are difficult to access. Our recommendation, then, was to create a website that would allow the user to gain information on these programs and agencies in a matter of minutes, shaving weeks or months off their search for assistance.

The key feature of the website will be an interactive search. After answering a short series of questions, a list of programs for which the user is most likely to be eligible will appear. Other features of the site include a listing of all the programs sortable by program, agency, or assistance type; a frequently asked questions and helpful documents section; a glossary of terms (clickable from anywhere on the site one of the terms appears); and a link to Empire State Development's calendar of events.

To advise us on the site's content and on making sure the site is widely employed by users and agencies alike, we put together a steering committee comprised of a cross section of agencies in the two counties. That group met monthly from August to November, and employed a Solicitation for Proposals (SFP) process to recommend a firm to design and develop the site.

Following the review of responses to the SFP and an interview process, the committee recommended Conbrio, a local WBE/MBE small business, to design and develop our small business assistance website. ENRP voted at its December 3, 2004 general meeting to award the contract to Conbrio as recommended.

The site will be designed and developed in the first quarter of 2005, with launch targeted for April of next year. In the meantime, the committee will work on outreach to the remainder of the agencies to ensure full participation, and will also develop a public marketing campaign to raise awareness and foster use of the site.

ENRP is seeking funding for these efforts from multiple sources. Thanks to the Niagara County Legislature, and Erie County Legislators Elise Cusack, Albert DeBenedetti, and Barry Weinstein for their financial contributions, and to the University at Buffalo Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth for their technical assistance on the project.

### **Public Transportation-Job Access Pilot & Policy**

The ENRP Transportation Subcommittee undertook an effort to determine the connectivity between areas of low car ownership and emerging job sectors. Research showed that, while not currently a problem reaching critical mass, there was a definite need to better connect emerging jobs in the suburbs to people who need them in the cities. This was especially true for jobs on non-traditional or staggered shifts.

In cooperation with the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, ENRP selected two pilot areas (one in each county). To identify areas of transit dependency we used census tracts of household income of less than \$25,000 and a zero car ownership rate of greater than 30 percent.

In Erie County this area was located on the east side of Buffalo, and was to be connected to the Walden Avenue – Buffalo Niagara International Airport corridor. The pilot resulted in added weekend and late night service to the airport along the Genesee Street (#24) route; a new (Route #204) Metrolink reverse commute express service from downtown Buffalo to BNIA employers; and new weekend and late night service for Lancaster employers on the Sycamore Street (#6) route.

In Niagara County, the areas between the Seneca Niagara Casino and the Niagara Falls International Airport became that county's pilot project. It has resulted in extended trips to Liberty Drive Industrial Park and diverted weekend trips to serve the Prime Outlets along the Pine Avenue (#55) route; and a new Metrolink shuttle (Route #201) between Wheatfield and Summit Park Mall. In addition, several other service changes or additions are under review.

The pilot was important to show the need for and viability of the concept, but the real success will come in the implementation of a sustainable policy for evaluating public transportation needs during the economic development process.

Specifically, there should be a time during the work of the Industrial Development Agencies and the Workforce Investment Board when data about their projects is handed to the GBNRTC and NFTA for an evaluation of public transit needs. Designating a set process and persons of responsibility will help ensure the successful continued execution of the process.

To effectuate this, the relevant agencies will be brought together in early 2005 to begin writing and implementing this process.

### **Economic Development Outreach Sessions**

The ENRP Government Affairs Subcommittee periodically conducts outreach to the local governments in the two counties to inform them of our efforts and to engage them in relevant projects. The next such outreach session will be on the topic of the economic development process. These have been developed over the last few months, and will take place in early 2005.

One session will be done in each county, with mayors and supervisors, council and board members, planning boards, county legislatures, and state delegations among the invited. A team of presenters will take the audience through the economic development process; including the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise, ENRP, the IDAs, the Regional Economic Development Database, Empire State Development's SiteFinder, and the Regional Economic Development Strategy.

The municipal officials will be told of opportunities to get properties included in SiteFinder and the REDD, and how to better connect with the entire process. A handout will list all contact information and a summary of each item.

## **Niagara Falls International Airport**

ENRP has long been committed to the development of the Niagara Falls International Airport as part of a regional economic development and tourism strategy. We have worked to foster communication between all the interested parties, and have urged forward progress at the NFIA.

As part of our efforts, ENRP hosted a “two way presentation” at our October 1, 2004 general meeting. The NFTA presented an update on their efforts to develop the NFIA, then we presented them with updates on our major initiatives and how the NFIA fits into them. Topics covered included the Framework for Regional Growth, power relicensing, the Regional Economic Development Strategy, the Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative, the public transportation-job access policy, and bi-national planning.

We will continue to follow-up with the NFTA to ensure that our efforts inform each other, and are fully integrated into everyone’s work product.

## **Regional Economic Development Strategy**

ENRP continues to work with the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth to produce a Regional Economic Development Strategy. The REDS will identify a set of clusters for the region, analyze our strengths and weaknesses in fostering those clusters, and provide implementation steps to better develop them.

This effort was somewhat dormant during the better part of 2004 while other interested parties determined their role in the process. The result is that the ECIDA will conduct a cluster analysis that will compliment the REDS.

In the coming months the Technical Advisory Committee will be reconvened, and a final document will be produced for implementation. ENRP will continue to work closely on this important effort.

## **Tourist Transportation**

The Tourism & Culture Subcommittee continues to work of the issue of how to best provide tourist transportation in the region. It was determined that the three most likely options were to use existing or modified NFTA service; provide a shuttle for specific events; or provide a season-long shuttle service.

To test one of those theories, the Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation (headed by Subcommittee Chair David Rosenwasser) paid for a free shuttle to be provided from the Wing Festival in downtown Buffalo to Niagara Falls. Over the course of the weekend, not one person rode it. This tells us that people coming to a specific event are not likely to then take side trips to other destinations via shuttle.

More research is needed to determine which of the remaining two options is preferable. ENRP recommended to the BNCVB Cultural Tourism Committee (of which ENRP Administrator Tod Kniazuk is a member) that the CTC, ENRP, and the NTCC conduct said research in 2005. Pending approval from the BNCVB, we shall do just that.

## **Shoreline Corridor Memorandum of Understanding**

GBNRTC took the lead in getting all the municipalities and agencies along the Shoreline Corridor to sign a memorandum of understanding committing them to working together on maintenance of the corridor and implementing a coordinated signage system. ENRP was included among the signatories, and has assisted GBNRTC in promoting the project.

## **Cultural Tourism Directional Signage**

Unfortunately, there is not much new to report on our efforts to locate 84 directional signs indicating major cultural attractions in the City of Buffalo. Our partners still stand ready to fund the project and construct the signs, but to date the City of Buffalo has not yet given the go-ahead on the project.

We continue to offer assistance in the confirmation of the locations, and any other help that is practical. The city has and still

does indicate an interest in completing this project, but has not yet committed to and taken the specific actions needed for construction to begin. We are hopeful to see movement (and the signs themselves) in 2005.

### **NYSDOT Testimony**

As part of its reorganization process, the New York State Department of Transportation held a series of public forums across the state to solicit input on transportation projects and priorities.

ENRP developed and delivered testimony at their August 3, 2004 meeting at ECC City Campus. We knew that many would come forward to testify on specific projects, so we focused on several regional transportation priorities. They included the need to recognize the localized impacts of continued bi-national cooperation and global trade corridors; the need to focus on rebuild and maintenance of existing infrastructure; a comprehensive revision of facilities ownership; and immediate implementation of a comprehensive, universal approach to bridge maintenance.

Further, development of finance strategies to permit a strategic approach to planning and program management; development and deployment of an intelligent, graded approach to the administrative procedures for federal aid projects; and the crucial competitive necessity of a sophisticated transportation and logistics infrastructure for regional economic development and job creation.

### **Other Significant Efforts**

In addition to the aforementioned, ENRP continues its work on several other efforts, including:

- Electronic Permitting
- Regional Economic Development Database
- Power Relicensing
- Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative
- BNCVB Cultural Tourism Committee